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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

2.13

Both the mahout and the elephant start their training at a young age. A mahout generally begins to learn his trade when he’s about ten years old and is assigned a baby elephant to look after. He’ll probably be paired with this elephant for the rest of his life. It’s traditionally a family trade, with knowledge being passed down from one generation to another. There are no formal qualifications for the job, but extreme patience is required. An elephant will learn up to 65 commands in its life – depending on what work it’s expected to do – and the mahout has to teach these. The mahout must also develop an intimate understanding of his elephant – something that only comes with time and experience – so that he knows when it’s sick or unhappy. In this way he can get the best out of his elephant. It’s a very physical job and extremely hard work. The elephant must be fed and bathed daily and watched so that it doesn’t run away.